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"COLLECTIVE LIFE" AND THE FAMILY IN CHINA'S COMMUNES

by Nils Stefansson
(Historian and Writer on Contemporary Asia)

SUMMARY: "Collective life" is the watchword of Communist China's new communes — giant super-collectives with tens of thousands of members. The mess halls, nurseries and kindergartens now being set up by the thousands will allow the regime to use women as laborers in agriculture and industry. More important, they are part of the Communist campaign to destroy Chinese loyalty to the family.

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"Get organized along military lines, do things the way battles are carried out, and live collective lives."

This is the slogan of mainland China's new rural communes -- large collective farms with tens of thousands of members -- as reported in the Communist Party's theoretical magazine Red Flag on September 1, 1958.

"Collective life" is the Communists' term for their drastic transformation of the Chinese village. The peasants' land was taken away from them during the collectivization drive of 1955-56. Communes go much farther; they are intended to destroy the Chinese family.

The communes have characteristics not found in the collectives of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. For example, a dispatch from the official New China News Agency (NCNA) on September 1, 1958 said that the organization of communes "involves the setting up of mess halls, nurseries, kindergartens, and tailoring teams."

Women will no longer perform their traditional duties -- cooking, laundering, sewing, and looking after children. This will be done by communal institutions, and the women will be assigned to labor brigades for work in the fields or even in distant factories.

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This is intended to break up the family unit. Families may meet during meals in the communal mess hall, in organized recreation supervised by the commune, or at Communist meetings. They will be together in their own home only in the evening -- assuming that husband and wife are not working different labor shifts and are not required to attend political lectures.

The commune is not a theoretical form to be adopted in the distant future. A September 30, 1958 report from NCNA said that "90.4% of all peasant households have joined people's communes." It seems certain that a number of these are still only nominally functioning as communes, but it is equally clear that Peiping is determined to force the entire peasantry into communes.

Collective institutions unique to China's communes are also being set up at a rapid pace. The September 30 NCNA report added that "According to statistics from eleven provinces and autonomous regions 1.4 million public mess halls and 1.2 million infant care groups have been set up." (There are 27 provinces and regions in mainland China, so the total must be far greater.)

The Communists give two reasons for organizing these new institutions. A July 5, 1958 report from NCNA said that "The establishment of more public canteens, laundries, nurseries, and other facilities would not only make a great saving in labor power but would also change people's attitudes."

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On July 22, 1958 the Peiping People's Daily put the same idea in different words: "Public mess halls play their part in facilitating the change in the rural outlook... thereby reinforcing the ideological position of collectivism."

The "attitude" which the Communists intend to change is of course the Chinese peasant's strong loyalty to his family -- always the fundamental principle of Chinese morality.

Traditionally, the family has been the center of Chinese life -- even more so than in most other societies. Other peoples direct their religious feelings toward a deity or another world, but most Chinese have concentrated them on the family. These ties have persisted despite Communist pressure and indoctrination.

To a Chinese, his highest responsibility is to honor his ancestors, maintain the unity of his family, and assure the prosperity of his descendants. The Communists plan to destroy this loyalty to the family and substitute for it loyalty to the state and obedience to party orders.

"The great saving in labor power" will come about through the use of women as laborers. In China, as in other peasant societies in Asia and elsewhere, women have always worked hard in the family fields.

Under the commune system, however, the fields no longer belong to the family, women must work the full commune schedule -- from dawn to dusk -- and, most important, they will have no choice. They must work wherever the commune authorities send them -- even to mines or factories in the next province or in another region. They cannot choose to remain with their families.

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The People's Daily of Peiping, official organ of the Communist Party's central committee, said on August 18, 1958 that in Heilungkiang province "the establishment of more than 50,000 nurseries has allowed more than 225,000 women to take part in summer plowing. In the 21 counties making up Ya-tzu administrative district (in Shansi province) over 344,000 women were able to get out of their kitchens because 90% of young children are looked after in nurseries."

In Tali county of Shensi province, the People's Daily continued, "out of the 26,000 women who have children ranging from one to seven years of age, 25,000 formerly had to prepare meals, make clothes, or grind grain..."

"Now that nurseries and common mess halls have been established in every corner of the county, ... the 25,000 women are now able to participate in production all year round."

The Chinese Communists' campaign against the family includes the elimination of the home itself. Article 5 of the draft regulation for communes, printed in the People's Daily for September 4, 1958, provides that:

"...members joining the commune should turn over their private plots of land and place private houses, lands, livestock and trees under the ownership of the commune..."

After the peasants give up their houses to the communes they may be turned out; article 20 stipulates that "small residential areas may gradually be merged..." Once this is done, the regulations continue, "members occupying the houses shall pay rent."

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Teng Hsiao-ping, vice-premier and member of the Politburo, said in an interview printed by NCNA on September 30, 1958 that in the future, "all residential districts in the rural areas" would be built like cities. "All houses will be relocated."

This policy is already being carried out. Dennis Bloodworth, an English journalist who had just completed a tour of the mainland, wrote in the (London) Observer for September 14, 1958 that in Szechuan province he had seen "individual farmhouses demolished and great tenements, equipped with communal kitchens and canteens, designed to accomodate a hundred families, rising incongruously in the fields."

Not satisfied with their action against the living, the Communists are also disturbing the dead. Article 19 of the draft regulations says that "The commune shall build communal graveyards....tombs may be removed if it is necessary to do so..."

A People's Daily article said that in Liaoning province "Some factory buildings and walls have been erected with tablets from graveyards."